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1320/11237

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23 October 2012

What changed the meaning of Family?

People see family in different ways and from different point of views. A family can be build up with different members. In the stories “What is a Family” by Pauline Irit Erera, Children of Gay Fathers” by Robert L. Barret and Bryan E. Robinson, and “Cohabitation Instead of Marriage” by James Q. Wilson each give a different opinion on what truly makes up a family. So what is really considered a family? Does a family consist of a gay couple with kids, or does it include extended family members that include grandparents, aunt and uncles. In the world today the term family doesn’t really have a definition for it anymore, as you will see in the short stories comparison.

In “What Is a Family” Erera stats that “White, Western, two-parented families have generally been what we compare all families too no matter what the culture, ethnicity, race, or class is. (417) Erera has written lots of books about family diversity that focused on different members of the family. “The early definition of what is a family was put out by George Peter Murdock in 1949”. (418) His ideal family consists of adults of the opposite sex and two who relationship was approved by the society.” In the short story Children of gay Fathers by Robert L. Barret and Bryan E. Robinson they talk about how gay fathers raised children. Barret is a professor of counseling at University of North Carolina, who is a gay father and grandfather of five grand kids. Robinson is a professor of counseling of special education and child development. Robinson had authored over twenty five books and also more than a 100 articles, (409) both of these authors -discuss how a family can consist of parents of the same sex and the children can still have a normal lifestyle. Barret and Robinson say that children of gay fathers are like children from other families.(410) Pauline Irit Erera who wrote “What is a Family” agrees that given the diversity a complete definition of family is hard to define because it depends on the purposes and circumstances. She explains how family is now made up of uncle, aunt, grandparents and also cousins. So a family could also include extended family members. (418) Erera also ask a question if a child can have more than one father or mother? Barret and Robinson say that “children who live with gay fathers must be prepared to face ridicule and harassment , Erera agree stating that “Women, minorities, lesbians, gays and nonconforming groups were subject to discrimination, and family problems got little attention or social assistance.” Another group included in the discrimination was African Americans who fought to keep rights more than trying to build a family. They both state that no matter what the minorities will usually have more harassment then a family that has parents of the opposite sex.

Erera states in “What is a family”, “that families challenge gender roles and influence gender typing by what they say and what they do.” Barret and Robinson agrees by saying that “As they try to merge their gayness with father role, they encounter a different conflict: deciding how open to be about their sexual relationships and how much exposure to the gay community to offer their children”. They both define how the roles of the parent in a family can be played out in some family cases where they father may be gay ends up struggling to play both roles in parenthood as the mother and the father. Barret and Robinson stats that study found that homosexual fathers differed from their heterosexual counterparts in providing more nurturing and in having less traditional parenting attitudes. (410) Wilson talks about in “Cohabitation instead of Marriage” how the affection and the companionship it entailed were valuable supports to family life”. While on the other hand Barret and Robinson says otherwise by stating that a gay father shows more affection and emotion when he comes out to the child can cause harm because of the fear of being rejected or fear of being hurt or damaging the child’s self-esteem. (410)

Erera explains the rise and decline of the traditional families. The meaning of family has been changing ever since the early 1900’s.Only about “three fifths of U.S households in the 1950’s actually fit the definition of family with a bread-winner-husband and a housewife”. The main reason for family change was the breakdown of the postwar social compact between government, corporation, and workers. (418) Wilson ask an eye catching question “ If marriage is designed to help solver a society’s need to maintain a family, and if modern societies such as ours have created ways of raising children that are independent of family life, then family life ought not to be very important.” (430) Erera then stat that does the availability of birth control pills and other methods along these line gave women control over reproduction, could these changes be the reason for not being married. The fact that acceptance of sexual behavior had become more common in society. She mentions does a family necessarily have to contain two adult, and do the adults have to be of the opposite sex.